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SB8- SUPPORT
SB1105- SUPPORT
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SB921: AN ACT REQUIRING REPORTING ON THE STUDENTS FIRST PLAN

While I support the spirit and the content of this bill requiring oversight of the product of the students first plan, I worry that it is way too little and much too late.

The bill tracks graduation, completion, and transfer metrics which, in the absence of information about academic standards and investment could be misleading--consider the number of high school graduates who arrive at our community colleges without the skills for college work. But it also tracks levels and types of staffing and spending, which provides at least some context that might inform how we read the other measures, and some accountability. Again, though, in the absence of further information, even that could be misleading.

I would recommend modifying this bill so that this committee can take advantage of both the

- FAC, a body established to provide input to both the Board of Regents and the legislature, and
- the still-existent Higher Education Consolidation Committee.

Meetings of the consolidation committee together with reports from the FAC can be used to gather qualitative and more substantive input on matters of shared governance and academic standards from those who regularly come in contact with students and the consequences of system policies.

Unfortunately, though many mechanisms by which this body can exercise oversight concerning the CSCU system already exist, those mechanisms have resulted, of late, in very little information and no intervention. The consolidation of the community colleges has proceeded in spite of the recorded opposition of every union representing faculty and staff in the CSCU system, votes of no confidence, and predictions of our current plight from governance bodies. It has moved forward on the word of exclusively those whose job descriptions require its success. It has promised savings and produced only costs-- including specific line items funded through ARPA dollars that promised to eventually 'pay for themselves' in enrolment all *while* the system projects a dismal enrolment trajectory through the very same year (2025) that resulting enrolment was promised to cover the initiative's cost of \$25M¹. And though financial reports are required, no thorough accounting of the consolidation's total costs has been provided.

The consolidated college was also advertised to this committee as an effort in the pursuit of equity, even though faculty and staff worried that a process that undermined shared governance, and a final centralized structure that places decision-making far from the places students are, would result in an

¹ The cost is now less than \$25M but only because it has failed to generate the expected enrolment (the justification for its existence) and we therefore require fewer positions.

inferior academic product. That remains to be seen, but the very design and impetus for the consolidation betrays that it is necessarily in opposition to any aspirations to equity...

SB1105: AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERCENTAGE OF COURSES TAUGHT BY PART-TIME FACULTY AT THE REGIONAL COMMUNITY-TECHNICAL COLLEGES

At the community colleges, over 75% of our workforce is contingent. That is, the vast majority of our workers go from short-term contract to short-term contract without guarantee of future work, without benefits, with the risk of last-minute course cancellations, and with unusual hurdles toward collecting unemployment when left suddenly without work. Many of these contingent workers were in our classrooms and student services offices through the pandemic even though the colleges made no long-term commitments to them and even though they were provided no health benefits. Adjuncts are capped at no more than 8 credits a semester so they must have other sources of income to survive.

The percentage of adjuncts is highest in the community college workforce, lower at the CSUs, and even lower at UConn. This represents a relative underinvestment in instruction as student bodies get poorer and browner across public higher education in Connecticut. That sort of public disinvestment in the places where people of color are on the rise has come to be referred to as *racialized (and classed) austerity*. Nationwide, only three other states rely more heavily on adjunct instructors in their community colleges than we do even though we are one of the wealthiest states in the country.

Aspirations toward equity would require investments in the places where historically excluded populations are found but our community colleges have done the opposite. This model falls short of the standards of equality, much more so those of equity. Not just that— we know that shifting this balance in the other direction would require significant investment in the community colleges. But in promising only savings as a result of consolidation, the administration betrays that this structural injustice is the underlying premise of the very college advertised as promoting equity.

The role of adjuncts is itself valuable. Not every adjunct is exploited, and students often benefit greatly from instructors who also currently work in the field or who teach from the passion for a subject or for the love of teaching. The adjunct role is also an opportunity for many young academics to gain experience and is a role where we find the greatest diversity in our workforce as a result. I am very grateful for the seven years I spent as an adjunct at Three Rivers Community College while I was in graduate school. There I discovered that community college classrooms are the ones I like the best. I was lucky to snag a rare full-time opening in my field and make it a career. We need more such opportunities for our long-standing adjuncts to do the same, instead of leaving them in dead end positions for years on end no matter how much the college owes to their contributions. But there are fewer and fewer full-time positions available.

The problem with adjunct labor at our colleges is that it should be *adjunct*-- that is, supplemental to the primary faculty body. But our adjunct faculty base is our instructional core and this sort of overreliance on contingency is, at this point, an exploitative labor practice. The colleges make no commensurate commitment to the very people who ARE the college.

And to reiterate, as things stand, the consolidated college that will serve a majority non-white student body and the least wealthy students in our public higher education system was advertised as being a triumph for equity. This planned overreliance on adjunct instructors betrays that it represents exactly the opposite. The system has promised only savings from the community college portion of our public education system for years, but the situation demonstrates how severely underfunded we already are—we are so far from the ideal that we cannot afford to shift these staffing trends. In assuring savings and containment, rather than investment, the system appears to be responding to a perceived mandate, perhaps one that is implied by the levels of recurring state funding it receives. SB1105 explicitly imposes a very different mandate. I urge you to pass this bill and to provide the funding needed to meet these goals.

SB8: AN ACT CONCERNING HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY AND GRADUATE RETENTION

SB8 proposes to increase the minimum PACT award and to extend its application to returning students. Many of our students are afforded a second chance at a degree at our community colleges or have interruptions in their community college career, so this is a much-needed expansion in application. The increase to the minimum award speaks for itself. I strongly support these modifications but hope that we can work toward a long-term solution of not just debt-free but tuition-free college that extends to the universities also. As long as our tuition remedies cover only community colleges, our students are left with a gulf to leap to continue on to bachelors degrees. The absence of that bridge has the potential to exacerbate existing racial and class disparities in attainment. It is an argument that Stephen Adair (former chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee) and I made in [advocating for Sanders-Jayapal's College for All](#) in early 2021 when it all seemed quite possible. I expect many of us will continue to advocate at the federal level to support our efforts here in the state. Incentivizing students who might have chosen otherwise to remain at the community colleges hurts both students and the universities. And as long as we are using a last-dollar model, it is difficult to address the expenses that are the greatest obstacles for our students.

HB6773: AN ACT CONCERNING THE NEEDS OF HOUSING INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Research shows that living expenses are the greatest challenge to being a student those who qualify for Pell Grants. That is one of the reasons to support an increase in the minimum PACT award. It is also a reason to support this proposal to study the needs of housing insecure students. It is a struggle that often makes itself known—in one way or the other-- in my classroom. I would love to be in a position to better address it.

HB6774: AN ACT CONCERNING POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

While we hope to move more of our part time faculty into full time positions and hope that SB1105 will take effect to make that more possible, there will always be a role for adjuncts at our colleges and universities. We recommend that the study of postsecondary education include the topic of health benefits for adjuncts. A recent survey suggests that the number of adjuncts who do not already have access to coverage elsewhere is likely to be smaller than previously expected, making the cost less daunting. There are models across the country that we might borrow or begin from. Please include it as part of the study.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and thank you for considering these important bills. Returning to the issue of reporting on Students First, I do worry that in the impending opening of a single community college and the simultaneous closure of all twelve existing ones, we have suffered such structural damage that efforts toward meaningful oversight face even greater challenges than before. I urge you to make sure to listen to those at the ground level where policies meet students to make sure that advertised goals match implementation and that our public higher education system is, in fact, fulfilling its mission.

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